



In Solidarity: New York City stronger together - by Heidi Burkhart

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Dear New York City,

Firstly, I know we will make it through this. We are resilient and no true New Yorker will ever take failure as an option. Yet, in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, I am concerned for New York City. I am concerned for our infrastructure, our workers, our framework. I am concerned for our affordable housing families, our workforce families, our elderly residents, and everyone who makes New York City “New York City.”

If you know affordable housing, you know many complexes are home to a number of elderly residents who know the neighborhoods better than we do. Some of these elderly individuals are at community board meetings advocating for both their housing and the opportunity to be actively

involved in bettering their communities. These folks give us the hope that we will get through these hard times. They have been through difficult times before and have come out the other side – often stronger than they had been prior. They can show us how to weather this storm. They sit in front of the buildings chatting with everyone who will give them time. They are the historians of our communities. During these times when they are at the most risk, we must do whatever we can to protect them, just as they would do for us.

According to the CDC's most recent analysis of the Covid-19 epidemic, 31% of all cases, 45% of hospitalizations, 53% of ICU admissions, and 80% of all fatalities from the virus have occurred among adults aged 65 and older. The highest percentage of severe outcomes are among those aged 85+. These are difficult statistics to comprehend, but they are important to focus on at this time. We all have parents, grandparents, or even sisters and brothers within these age ranges. Don't you want to protect them, your family? So, these are our marching orders: we must protect our protectors, the older populations, by simply sitting on our couch and in doing so, following and supporting every effort to (self) quarantine.

You ask what my biggest concern besides my family is during this trying time? It is my life, my profession, my home—and the NYC affordable housing community. 65,701 families that live in public housing have a member 62 or older living with them. That is nearly 40% of these families that are at risk. You have NYCHA in which 1 out of 15 New Yorkers call home. In these buildings, 39.7% of the households are headed by a person 62 or older. NYCHA serves 564,301 New Yorkers which makes up about 7% of our population. (This does not include all the affordable housing such as Section 8 buildings or LIHTC construction.) So, when we speak of the dangers to New York City of not staying home, we are talking about much more than just each other and our own families. We are speaking about our network, our community, and our infrastructure staying intact! Even more importantly, we are talking about the foundation of our society, our elders.

We must care for everyone in our effort to conquer yet again; to get out of this horrible situation with as few casualties as possible. Our neighbors are depending on us, our at-risk communities are depending on us, and our elderly are depending on us. What I don't want to see is some of us lose loved ones for something as simple as not remaining sheltered in place, and at home. We must stand with them and we need to stay home for them. Staying home and isolating for each other is a small price to pay to keep our family and friends safe. A few more weeks is not going hurt anyone and will exponentially help many. I pray this doesn't hit home because the reality is once we have one person close to us affected, our entire lives will be shaken along with so many lives around us, especially considering the six degrees (or less) of separation that exists in NYC. If it affects me, it will affect you – and vice versa. The only answer is to halt the spread in its tracks and obey the directive to stay home.

Remember, staying home doesn't mean we are not working. Many of us have the luxury of working in jobs we can do remotely. We can work from home and stay with kids who are out of school or relatives who need us. In doing so, we need to stay optimistic and resilient. It is definitely difficult to get through these times. We are social beings who want to interact, to talk, to hug, and to celebrate one another. We need to step back from this so we can do it all again, once things return to normal.

Right now, we must focus on each day as it comes. We have our 'essentials' - food and home - and take everything else one step at a time. Today, some have more than others, but the tables can turn quickly, as we have seen. Supporting each other is key. We need to focus on keeping our communities not only alive but thriving.

New York City is a beautiful city. Let's show the world how strong we are as one. Let's show them how we stick together to conquer anything and everything. Let's just show them!

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